



Command Sgt. Maj. Anthony Cordova speaks to guests after his change of responsibility ceremony April 27. Cordova became the first command sergeant major for U.S. Army Garrison Brussels. (Photo Isabelle Gillet)

USAG Brussels receives first CSM

BRUSSELS, Belgium – U.S. Army Garrison Brussels, the smallest such unit in Installation Management Command-Europe, has grown by one after getting its first-ever command sergeant major. Command Sgt. Maj. Anthony Cordova assumed the role as garrison

CSM during a change of responsibility ceremony here April 27.

“This is a watershed event in our garrison’s history,” said Lt. Col. Pat Kilroy, USAG Brussels commander. “The assignment of Command Sgt. Maj. Cordova is a sign that the U.S. Army recognizes Brussels as a robust – perhaps small, but still robust – Army command. I couldn’t be more delighted.”

USAG Brussels, in the past, had acting command sergeants major. In fact, Cordova assumed his position from Master Sgt. Leroy Lee, who filled in as the garrison’s senior enlisted leader. Kilroy applauded both Lee and Brussels’ sister garrison, USAG Schinnen, whom Lee is assigned to.

Cordova, now, is the first centrally selected command sergeant major in Brussels’ history.

Hailing from La Mirada, Calif., Cordova joined the Army in 1982, and is frank that he did so because he needed a job as an 18-year-old.

“The recruiter looked at me,” Cordova recalled, “my test scores and said I could be an X-Ray technician. ‘Great,’ I said!”

But when the recruiter noted that it would be 12 months before he could actually put on the uniform, Cordova replied that he couldn’t wait that long because of a pressing need to put bread on the table. The recruiter then offered him other specialization options, each that came with deferred entry on active duty, albeit with decreasing delay.

Chuckling, the 25-year veteran said: “I was getting desperate. Even the infantry branch involved six months delayed entry. The recruiter must have sensed my desperation, because he finally found me a branch (the Adjutant General’s Corps) that put me on active duty within two weeks.”

After completing basic training at Fort Leonard Wood, Mo., Cordova

reported to Fort Bragg, N.C., as a member of the 82nd Airborne Division's AG company. The five years he spent at Fort Bragg were notable for two reasons, he noted.

“First, I found I really enjoyed being a Soldier,” the command sergeant major said. “Sure, the Army provided me a paying job, but, more important, I really appreciated the camaraderie, the caring leadership and the clear signs that this was an organization in which advancement came from hard work and merit.”

The second reason for the assignment being memorable: it was where Cordova met and married his wife, Michelle.

The couple departed Fort Bragg in 1987 for their first overseas assignment, Neu Ulm, Germany, near Munich. After three years, Cordova moved to Fort Jackson as a drill instructor. “Being a DI was an incredibly intense experience,” he said. “But I gained a new appreciation for the great personal rewards of training Soldiers.” He also earned a promotion to the rank of sergeant first class.

Cordova's status as a newly-minted E-7 also gained him a return to Europe and the operational Army. Assigned to the 1st Armored Division's Engineer Brigade as the brigade S-1 (personnel) noncommissioned officer-in-charge, the Cordova's resided for four years in Bad Kreuznach, Germany – one year of which Cordova spent in Bosnia, where his unit deployed to support NATO's Implementation Force.

He recalled the incredible devastation Bosnia's countryside, and the positive impact U.S. and allied Soldiers had on people there.

“My unit built the bridge over the Sava River. You don't appreciate how much we depend upon infrastructure until you have to help rebuild a country,” he said.

The IFOR deployment was also Cordova's first time in a joint-service environment. “We worked closely, as a team, with Navy Seabees and Air Force engineers,” he said. “It was a great experience.”

Leaving the 1st AD, Cordova moved to Schwetzingen, Germany, where he became first sergeant of 1st Personnel Command for a year. Then selected for the Sergeants Major Academy, Fort Bliss, Texas, the future CSM was a student there when 9/11 hit.

“A fair number of my classmates wanted to quit the academy then and there and return to the ‘muddy boots’ Army,” he said. “But the commandant gathered us together, and told us that there would be plenty of opportunities to serve the Army and the nation.”

Having graduated from the academy, Cordova was then assigned to the National Training Center, Fort Irwin, Calif. As an E-8, he received a vote of confidence from his seniors when the retiring garrison sergeant major recommended that Cordova replace him, which he did as the acting CSM. “I really appreciated that sergeant major having gone to bat for me,” he said.

After a year, Cordova was promoted to E-9, and, eventually, selected as Brussels' first command sergeant major.

Cordova says he is delighted to be in Brussels as a part of the Installation Management Command-Europe team.

And how does Brussels differ from his last assignment? “At Fort Irwin, the Morale, Welfare and Recreation directorate alone had some 300 people,” he says. “That's triple our entire Brussels garrison numbers. But we've got a high-visibility mission, supporting Americans working at NATO headquarters. And we're dedicated to serving a very joint community.”

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